UNITED NATIONS

CEDAW

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

Distr.
GENERAL

CEDAW/C/SR.380
16 June 1998

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

Eighteenth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 380th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Tuesday, 3 February 1998, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. ABAKA
(Vice-Chairperson)

CONTENTS

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 18 OF THE CONVENTION (continued)

Combined second, third and fourth periodic reports of the Dominican Republic (continued)

This record is subject to correction.

Corrections should be submitted in one of the working languages. They should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent within one week of the date of this document to the Chief, Official Records Editing Section, room DC2-750, 2 United Nations Plaza.

Any corrections to the records of the meetings of this session will be consolidated in a single corrigendum, to be issued shortly after the end of the session.

In the absence of the Chairperson, Ms. Abaka (Vice-Chairperson) took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 18 OF THE CONVENTION (continued)

Combined second, third and fourth periodic reports of the Dominican Republic (continued) (CEDAW/C/DOM/2-3, CEDAW/C/DOM/4, CEDAW/C/1998/I/CRP.1/Add.2)

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, Ms. Solano, Ms. Muñiz and Ms. Gutierrez (Dominican Republic) took places at the Committee table.

2. Ms. SOLANO (Dominican Republic), turning to the questions contained in the report of the pre-session working group (CEDAW/C/1998/I/CRP.1/Add.2) on article 12, said, in reply to question 71, that her country's health-care system was made up of various public and private institutions under the Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare. The main service-providing mechanisms were: the health services network of the Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare, which functioned as an open subsystem and was financed through taxes; the Dominican Social Security Institute, which functioned as a closed subsystem and was financed through compulsory contributions; the Social Security Institute of the Armed Forces and National Police; privately financed medical and insurance companies; self-managing insurance companies that were financed through voluntary contributions; privately financed clinics, diagnostic and research centres, one of the subsystems with the widest coverage; the private non-profit sector, mainly run by non-governmental organizations and financed from a combination of private, State and international assistance sources.

3. A national health system reform plan had been drawn up to regulate and improve the quality of health services. There was broad coverage for women, particularly in the area of gynaecological care. According to the Population and Health Census (ENDESA 96), 97 per cent of all pregnant women received pre-natal check-ups and over 90 per cent of births took place in institutions or hospitals. The levels of care during pregnancy were high, irrespective of the woman's place of residence, level of education and age. The main gynaecological and other services provided to women included screening for cancer of the uterus, breast cancer, sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS; pre- and post-natal care; and family planning services, in addition to access to general health services through the various hospital centres of the Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare. The main problems in the services made available to women were related to their quality. Birth control was safe and voluntary.

4. In reply to question 72, she noted that, under the national development plan, government policies aimed at improving the overall quality of life of the population in terms of reducing poverty levels, combating the high levels of illiteracy, improving public transport, housing and electricity services. In the area of health, there was a national plan for the reform and modernization of the health system with priorities defined for women. Women were entitled to pre-natal care and childbirth in hospitals; they were also offered advice on

breastfeeding. Family planning services included advice to users, the provision and monitoring of contraceptive methods and promotion of family planning through the radio, television and educational materials.

5. According to the Population and Health Census, 36.1 per cent of contraceptive methods were provided by the public sector, 46.9 per cent by non-governmental organizations with family planning programmes, and the remaining 16.5 per cent by other sectors. According to the latest epidemiological figures supplied by the Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare, there were 4,157 cases of AIDS and 4,083 cases of HIV infection, of which 33 per cent involved women and 66.6 per cent men. It was estimated that 28 per cent of all cases were unreported. Although the demographic profile of those affected with AIDS was predominantly male, cases concerning women were on the increase.

6. With reference to question 73, the Dominican Republic had achieved considerable reductions in its rates of malnutrition in recent decades, especially as far as inadequate weight for height was concerned. However, 32 per cent of pregnant women still suffered from iron deficiency. A national food and nutrition plan for 1995-2000 had been drawn up to address the problem of malnutrition; and women were one of the priority groups under that plan. There had been a significant decline in diseases that were subject to epidemiological monitoring. In the case of immunization against poliomyelitis, coverage was higher than 90 per cent throughout the country and it had therefore been declared eradicated. The number of measles cases had been reduced to 12 per 1,000,000 inhabitants. In the period 1988-1995, there had been a rising trend in the incidence of malaria; as a result of health measures taken by the authorities, the trend had been downward since 1996. There had been sporadic outbreaks of classic dengue fever in urban areas during the period 1980-1989. Since 1992, the number of such cases had increased, and the Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare had drawn up an emergency plan to educate the population on that disease.

7. Turning to question 74, she noted that the Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare had established a programme for strengthening the national system of statistics in the area of health; it was coordinated by the National Planning Office and the National Council on Population and the Family. An information and data-processing unit had also been established under the national plan on the reform of the health sector. On question 75, she said that the Department for the Advancement of Women gave priority to strengthening the national system of health statistics disaggregated by sex. That would generate reliable and timely information to improve the process of formulating, implementing and evaluating policies, programmes and projects in the area of health; it would also ensure that fewer vital statistics went unreported, especially statistics concerning maternal mortality. The Department for the Advancement of Women was a member of the Committee of the National Council on Population and the Family responsible for designing a system of information with a view to ensuring that the gender perspective was reflected therein.

8. With respect to question 76, she noted that abortion was illegal in her country in all circumstances. There were no public abortion services. Centres that offered such services did so illegally. The latest studies estimated that

there had been about 35,500 induced abortions, and that 16.6 per cent of maternal deaths were related to abortion. As far as question 77 was concerned, the sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS control programme (POCETS) had been established under the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare in addition to the National Commission on AIDS. The three basic components of that programme were the epidemiological monitoring of HIV/AIDS, an educational programme in areas where care was provided for HIV/AIDS patients, and education, including mass media campaigns focusing on the prevention of all sexually transmitted diseases. A national strategy for information on and prevention of AIDS had been established; and there was also a national action plan for women and AIDS which focused on research, education, communication, information and epidemiological control. The State also participated, together with various non-governmental organizations, in the establishment of the strategy for the prevention of HIV/AIDS among young women, which was basically aimed at promoting a positive attitude among young women towards the prevention of HIV/AIDS and reducing the external constraints that impeded the prevention of HIV/AIDS infection among young women.

9. In reply to question 78, she indicated that the Government was in the process of negotiating financing agreements with international cooperation agencies in order to maintain and improve health services. With respect to question 79, she noted that every year, over 10,000 cases of syphilis, gonorrhoea and herpes simplex were reported in her country. In the case of women, 27 per cent had vaginal infections, 9 per cent inflammatory pelvic diseases and 6 per cent chlamydia. The main causes of maternal mortality were toxaemia (25 per cent), infections (21 per cent), haemorrhages during childbirth (20 per cent), indirect obstetric causes (11 per cent), abortions (10 per cent) and puerperal complications (9 per cent).

10. Turning to question 80, she noted that in order to reduce maternal and infant mortality, the Government had adopted a National Plan to bring the maternal mortality rate to below 80 per 100,000 live births by the year 2000. That strategy had been outlined within the national social development plan, which was a point of reference for actions aimed at improving the living standards of the country's population, and, in particular, women and children. Activities currently being implemented included the provision of maternal and child care within health services, a safe drinking water programme, ongoing education of human resources in the health field and establishment of a system for monitoring maternal and infant deaths. Achievements to date included the establishment of offices in two health centres, the drawing up of a protocol for obstetric emergencies, the setting up of an epidemiological monitoring system for maternal and infant deaths and the definition of a joint strategy between the State and non-governmental organizations on sexual and reproductive health.

11. Ms. MUÑIZ (Dominican Republic), turning to article 13, said in response to question 81, that the social security system was currently being modernized in order to ensure broader coverage. There were various social security schemes. However, most of them had serious coverage limitations and current legislation did not include family members, self-employed workers and categories such as domestic servants, drivers and public employees. Some, like the Dominican Institute of Social Insurance, provided sickness benefits, maternity benefits and family insurance, including obstetric care for the wives of insured persons

and care for the newborn. In general, women had an equal right along with men to such benefits. Under most of the schemes, benefits were not provided to unmarried pregnant women. Similarly, a man's partner received benefits only if he was married to her. With respect to question 82, she noted that women who were insured under the social security scheme received the benefits established by law. However, the spouses of the insured received pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding and child-care benefits until the child was a year old only if they were married. The benefits of some schemes included the provision of loans to their members. There was no special mechanism responsible for handling claims relating to access to benefits and services.

12. As far as question 83 was concerned, as a result of the amendment to the Agrarian Reform Act women could benefit, on an equal footing with men, from agricultural loans, technical training and housing plans. On 8 March 1997, the Government had granted 1,280 plots to women in Cotuí, in the province of Sánchez Ramírez. More than 7,000 rural women would ultimately benefit.

13. Turning to question 84, she noted that the Government, through the Agrarian Institute was developing a programme with groups of rural women concerning the new legislation and the Department for the Advancement of Women had begun to disseminate the law through brochures and training workshops to groups of rural women. Similarly, the National Network for Technical Cooperation between institutions and organizations that supported rural women, involving 55 non-governmental organizations, had been set up. Non-governmental organizations had launched a process of consultations among rural women through workshops and regional meetings to disseminate the Act, using material produced by the Department for the Advancement of Women.

14. As to question 85, the beneficiaries of the housing schemes established under the national programme to combat poverty launched in August 1996, included women heads of household. The aim of the plan was to improve precarious human settlements through the joint involvement of the State and the community, and to improve housing by facilitating access of owners to credit.

15. Ms. SOLANO (Dominican Republic), turning to the questions on article 14, said, in connection with question 86, that rural women were not fully aware of their rights under the Convention, although organized women's groups had received information about the Convention. In that connection, measures adopted in 1997 included the establishment and upgrading of the status of the programme for rural women under the Ministry of Agriculture, the preparation of an educational programme on the amendments to the Agrarian Reform Act to be carried out by the Department for the Advancement of Women as of 1998, and the development by non-governmental organizations dealing with women's issues of educational and income-generating programmes as well as programmes for the protection of the rights of rural women. The main obstacle to the advancement of rural women was the fact that there was no national policy to develop the rural sector, nor was it a priority in national development plans and projects.

16. Concerning question 87, she indicated that mass educational campaigns on methods of contraception had existed since the late 1960s. In recent years, services in rural clinics under the Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare had been expanded. A shortcoming in that area was the limited service provided

by the National Council on Population and the Family in rural areas. According to the Population and Health Census, 93.9 per cent of rural women were aware of and could accurately describe at least one modern method of contraception, and 59.5 per cent of sexually active women used some method of contraception. The corresponding percentages of urban women were 97.6 and 66.4 per cent, respectively.

17. Replying to question 88, she said that no figures were available on maternal mortality by areas of residence. The Population and Health Census had estimated that there were 229 deaths for every 100,000 live births in 1983-1984. The lack of hospital records on such cases made it impossible to have information on maternal mortality and other health indicators. Turning to question 89, she noted that rural women were not very visible in local positions of power and in other positions of authority such as federations and associations of landholders and associations of agricultural producers. Stereotypes and cultural patterns regarding women had a greater influence in rural areas and that, together with the high levels of poverty, meant greater marginalization of rural women.

18. With respect to question 90, she said that women had the same rights as men to credit and technical assistance programmes. In order to ensure compliance with the legal provisions, the Department for the Advancement of Women had signed cooperation agreements with the Agricultural Bank, the Ministry of Agriculture and the Agrarian Institute. Loans were also being provided through the programme to promote and support micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises, through the provincial women's offices. Discriminatory practices continued to be an obstacle to the compliance with provisions on equal opportunities for rural women, since the executing agencies did not accord women priority when they determined who was to benefit from their activities.

19. In reply to question 91, she noted that the National Price Stabilization Institute had a programme for purchasing, on a large scale, the grains and rice produced by associations of small producers. Because of their low representation in such associations, women had little access to that service. With respect to question 92, according to the results of recent studies, the figure of 60 per cent of women heads of household did not correspond to reality. The living conditions of rural women were far worse than those of other segments of the population living in poverty. Indeed, rural women were the poorest of the poor, with high rates of illiteracy, general mortality, malnutrition and unemployment. It was also extremely difficult for them to get access to training and social services in general. While there was no general policy for rural women, the Department for the Advancement of Women was developing a programme in coordination with sectoral institutions of the Government to define regional development plans for rural women. In 1998, the overall development plan for women in the eastern part of the country would get under way.

20. With respect to question 93, she said that no priority had been given to rural women in national development projects. Generally, preference was given to women in implementing programmes and projects in areas such as nutrition, family planning and latrine construction, that were designed to solve problems relating to children and the family, and where women were viewed more as intermediaries for carrying out actions than as subjects of development.

Presently, the Department for the Advancement of Women was promoting the implementation of plans for the overall development of women in coordination with government agencies and non-governmental organizations.

21. Turning to question 94, she indicated that the Department for the Advancement of Women, together with the Ministry of Agriculture and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) were working on the establishment of the national support network for rural women. Regarding question 95, she noted that the Dominican Agricultural Bank was accepting applications for the granting of loans to micro- and small agricultural producers and that the Ministry of Agriculture had a revolving fund of 8 million pesos for granting credit to rural women's associations for the development of agricultural and agro-industrial plants and services. However, the coverage of such measures was limited.

22. In response to question 96, she said that under the amended Agrarian Reform Act, 1,280 women heads of household, who had been working the land on an infrequent basis because the previous legislation had discriminated against them, had been granted titles to plots of land. They had also become the direct beneficiaries of credit, training and technical assistance programmes for the farming of their plots. However, just 11 months after the implementation of reforms under that Act, there was not yet sufficient information to assess its impact.

23. With regard to question 97, since 1997 women had had equal rights with men in terms of access to land under the Agrarian Reform Act and to all the training programmes provided by the agrarian bodies. In order to ensure the equality of rights established under the Agrarian Reform Act, an agreement had been reached between the Agrarian Institute and the Department for the Advancement of Women to establish procedures and educate officials and technicians so that women would not suffer discrimination in practice. The programme in the Mothers' Centres did not include training in non-traditional areas. On question 98, the information system of the national network to support the advancement of rural women was being systematized. The rural women's division of the Ministry of Agriculture was establishing a data system on the situation of rural women, which incorporated a gender perspective.

24. With regard to question 99, she said that on various occasions the Government and non-governmental organizations had discussed the need to coordinate a working agenda to help increase the impact of the programmes which they were implementing, but they had not reached specific agreements. In the 1998 national budget, RD$ 19,950,600 was allocated to grants and support for projects developed by rural organizations and federations, although in view of the low participation of women in small producers' organizations, their share of those funds would be minimal. On question 100, rural organizations received support from the World Food Programme, in the form of food for work, from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, in the financing of production and training projects, and from the United Nations Population Fund, in the implementation of a programme on reproductive health in the most depressed regions of the Dominican Republic.

25. Referring to question 101, she said that there were no specific programmes for women relating to the use of natural resources and the preservation of the environment; that was one of the main constraints in improving the living conditions of rural women. On question 102 under article 15, article 1428 of the Civil Code remained in force. The Department for the Advancement of Women and the honorary committee of women advisers to the Senate were reviewing draft amendments to the Civil Code drawn up by women's organizations with a view to submitting them to the legislature for adoption. With reference to question 103, the principle of equal treatment in the courts was established, but in practice there was discriminatory treatment of women. There were legal aid services, legal clinics of the Department for the Advancement of Women, and also services provided by the Ministry of Labour and the Legal Aid Department, and by specialized non-governmental organizations. Women had limited access to those services because of lack of awareness of their existence and low coverage of the services provided by the Department for the Advancement of Women and non-governmental organizations. On question 104, since the Civil Code had not been amended, the bill on freedom of divorced women to choose their place of residence had not been tested in court. The restriction in the existing law therefore remained.

26. Referring to question 105 under article 16, the results of recent trends included an increase in the number of female-headed households, especially in the towns, to some 30 per cent, and a larger number of women entering the labour market, which gave them greater economic independence. In addition, there was an excessive burden of work for women, which was detrimental to their physical and emotional health, an increase in family poverty, especially families headed by women, and family instability as a result of changes in household structure. With regard to question 106, it was not possible for a mother to administer the personal property of minor children because the legal principle that the father was the administrator of the family property remained in force. A divorced woman was free to administer her own personal property. On question 107, a woman could not be the legal guardian of her husband because the principle that the husband was the administrator of the family property remained in force. The family council consisted of the justice of the peace who presided over it, and six members, either relations or friends of the person subject to judicial disability. It was one of the trusteeship bodies, and its basis was that the legal provisions in force did not empower women to administer family property. The powers of the family council were to meet to appoint a guardian and supervisory guardian, monitor his activities and authorize certain actions concerning the person or property of the incapacitated person.

27. Ms. GONZALEZ said that the reports demonstrated the political will of the Government of the Dominican Republic to fulfil its international human rights commitments, specifically in relation to the Convention. It was very significant that the plan of action for poverty reduction targeted women heads of household and that specific programmes had been initiated to help them develop alternative incomes. She welcomed the agreement between the National Office for the Advancement of Women and the National Statistical Office to incorporate a gender perspective into statistics, and was pleased that the National Office for the Advancement of Women was to be upgraded to a Ministry for Women and that it had formulated a short-, medium- and long-term plan of action. The progress made in reducing violence against women, including abuse

of their rights by police officers, showed what could be achieved when women's groups, non-governmental organizations and the Government combined their efforts. It was important for the Government to continue its efforts to combat the sexual abuse of children.

28. In relation to trafficking in women and children, the Government should consider the possibility of adopting new and broader measures to combat commercial sex rings, which operated mainly from Europe, apparently with impunity. With joint action among all the countries concerned, it should be possible to achieve results. The information provided on the reform of the health-care system showed that the Government was undertaking a major campaign against HIV/AIDS. It was impressive that in the Dominican Republic there were fewer illiterate women than men, since in most countries the reverse was true. It was commendable that Dominican women and non-governmental organizations had been able to broaden the political participation of women and achieve the promulgation of a law on quotas in 1997. She hoped that it would be possible to relieve the pressure of the Catholic Church, so as to establish sex education programmes and achieve progress in many other areas.

29. Ms. CORTI said that, although it was a small country, the Dominican Republic attracted the attention of the Committee because of the political will shown by the Government and the strength of the women's movement. It was commendable that the Government had established a National Committee for Monitoring the National Plan of Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women. The Committee was always concerned about the de facto, as well as the de jure situation in States parties. In the Dominican Republic, a first priority was to combat poverty, along with prostitution and trafficking in persons. There seemed to be a very high level of machismo in the Dominican Republic and a lack of involvement of women in political decision-making. Another problem was that there appeared to be two strata of women, those who were engaged, and those who were not empowered. As a result, not all women were aware of their rights and possibilities. The concordat with the Catholic Church was another obstacle to progress and modernization; women had to elaborate a strategy to bring about a clear separation between the Church and the State.

30. She felt that the Dominican Republic was not giving sufficient attention to working women. The Government needed to ensure better conditions for working women, stem emigration, and help women find work in their own country. There was an enormous gap between the private and public sectors, which needed to be addressed; and the relevant conventions of the International Labour Organization must be implemented. Although there was an elaborate health-care system, there seemed to be a lack of services for women.

31. Ms. KHAN said that there had been much legislative activity during the reporting period to protect the interests of women. She was disappointed, however, that the Constitution of the Dominican Republic did not explicitly enshrine the principle of the equality of men and women. She hoped that through the active involvement of the Department for the Advancement of Women, women would derive greater benefit from the new laws and measures and that changes would be made at the sociocultural level. The Department had the power and the rank to work for de facto equality.

32. It was mentioned in paragraph 146 of the fourth periodic report (CEDAW/C/DOM/4) that no special temporary measures had been taken to accelerate de facto equality between men and women. In view of the very high proportion of female-headed households, measures should be taken, especially in the areas of education and employment, to bring about sustainable changes in women's lives. She was impressed by the sensitization and training workshops for law enforcement authorities and other groups, and the public at large. Such activities were very important to combat traditional attitudes towards women. She urged the Government to take effective measures to guarantee girls and women greater access to education, especially in technology, so as to eradicate poverty.

33. Ms. HARTONO commended the very full answers and detailed information provided by the delegation from the Dominican Republic.

34. Ms. FERRER said that during the short period of its existence, the Department for the Advancement of Women had taken significant measures and undertaken important projects. Perhaps the main obstacles to the implementation of the Convention were the situation of extreme poverty in the Dominican Republic - 57.3 per cent of the population lived below the poverty line - and reduced spending on health and education as a result of structural adjustment. Women who were the most seriously affected in such situations must be accorded genuine priority in poverty eradication programmes. Like Ms. Corti and Ms. González, she was concerned that, with a budget of $4.5 million, the Department for the Advancement of Women had neither the resources, the authority or the personnel to make a tangible difference in the situation of women.

35. Further constitutional reforms and legislative amendments were also necessary. She stressed the importance of maintaining a separation between Church and State. The content of the concordat signed in 1954 was a major obstacle to the implementation of the Convention, particularly with regard to educating women on their sexual and reproductive rights. Non-governmental organizations could provide vital support to the Department for the Advancement of Women in addressing that situation. She called for greater protection of women workers in the export processing or free-trade zones and the maquila (assembly) enterprises. Lastly, the campaign launched in connection with the adoption of a law on violence against women was a significant step in the overall effort to eliminate stereotypes.

36. Ms. BUSTELO GARCIA DEL REAL also congratulated the delegation on its detailed report and its very complete answers to the Committee's questions. A greater female presence in political parties would help to mainstream activities for women in society. To that end, the Dominican women's movement should establish closer links with political structures. She noted the persistence of stereotypes, the need to reform the Civil Code, the disproportionately high unemployment figures for women, their lack of job opportunities and the related problems of prostitution and discrimination in the free trade zones and the social security system. It was grossly unfair that unemployed women could receive social security benefits only if they were married, particularly since many unmarried women in the Dominican Republic were heads of households.

37. Although the Dominican economy was based largely on tourism, including sexual tourism, and activities in the free-trade zone, the Government's policies to protect women working in those two areas were insufficient. Referring to article 6 of the Convention, she requested the delegation to provide data in its next report on legal reforms and the enforcement of penalties for procuring. She would appreciate statistics on the prosecution of persons engaged in the trafficking of women. Did their victims include Haitian migrant women? The Dominican Republic should conclude cooperation agreements with European countries with a view to combating prostitution, trafficking in women and the exploitation of female domestic workers.

38. She hoped that further constitutional reforms would result in the firm establishment of the principles of equality and non-discrimination and, in particular, the separation of Church and State, which would have a profound impact on maternal mortality, abortion, the prevention of HIV/AIDS and the elimination of stereotypes. Lastly, she welcomed the establishment of a female membership quota of 25 per cent in the political parties and hoped that it would have practical consequences in the next elections. She hoped that the fifth periodic report would contain more information on the implementation of the Convention in practice.

39. Ms. OUEDRAOGO also congratulated the delegation on its frank and objective report and responses to the Committee's questions. Referring to article 5 of the Convention, she urged the Dominican Government to make a greater effort to create equal opportunities for women and, with the help of the media, to intensify its campaign to eliminate stereotypes. To that end, it would be useful to incorporate courses on the Convention in school curricula and to prepare young women for marriage in order to reverse current negative trends.

40. Stressing the need to take additional measures to implement article 14, she inquired about the extent of women's involvement in programmes designed for them and the introduction of appropriate technology in the rural areas in order to enable women to devote more time to lucrative and leisure activities. She recommended the launching of a pilot project on the equitable sharing of household chores and also wondered whether the Dominican Republic planned to establish a special women's bank in order to increase women's access to credit and further promote income-generating activities for rural women. It would be useful if the fifth periodic report of the Dominican Republic contained gender-disaggregated statistics on productive employment, especially in the rural areas, in order to give the Committee some indication of the average income of rural women and men.

41. Ms. SATO thanked the delegation for its excellent and frank report and its responses to the Committee's questions. Measures for the advancement of women in the Dominican Republic remained weak. The insufficiency of gender-disaggregated statistics made it difficult to judge the real situation of Dominican women. She hoped that that would be remedied in the fifth periodic report.

42. Ms. JAVATE DE DIOS said that she had found the data contained in the report, particularly the studies cited, very helpful in elucidating certain developments. She welcomed the work of the national machinery in shaping

policy, advocating anti-discrimination legislation and monitoring compliance with international agreements on women. However, she, too, was concerned that the Department for the Advancement of Women might not have the necessary resources, authority and staff to carry out its work and looked forward to its being upgraded to a Ministry of Women in the future.

43. She welcomed the amendments to the Penal Code, the Code of Criminal Procedure and the Code for the Protection of Children and Adolescents as major achievements which strengthened the institutional and legal framework for dealing with violence against women. She commended, in particular, the motto of the national campaign: "There is no reason for abuse" (para. 154 (c) of the fourth report) and the Government's systematic and holistic approach to dealing with the problem and hoped that the fifth periodic report would contain more data on that subject. She expressed alarm at the high incidence of crimes of passion (para. 152 of the fourth report), which stemmed from the macho culture prevalent in many Latin American countries. The Government should investigate the phenomenon and launch awareness-building programmes to correct the notion that men were superior to women.

44. The information on female heads of household (paras. 157 to 166 of the fourth report) was ground-breaking in comparison to other reports of States parties; she would appreciate information on the extent to which those women were able to exercise their human rights.

45. Referring to paragraph 174 of the fourth periodic report and paragraph 88 of the second and third periodic reports, she inquired about the disturbing escalation of trafficking in Dominican women who migrated to European countries, mainly the Netherlands and Belgium, and to other Caribbean islands. In that connection, she wondered whether the Government had taken action to implement the recommendations contained in a study conducted by the International Organization on Migration (IOM) and welcomed Ms. Bustelo's proposals. Remedial action should include the enforcement of tight controls on forged passports and national identification cards, public information campaigns in heavy emigration areas, and the sustained monitoring of women from the Dominican Republic to their destinations, through bilateral cooperative efforts, if necessary.

46. The Agrarian Reform Act remained discriminatory in certain respects. For example, it prevented women, including female heads of households, from owning land in their own right, or even from inheriting property upon the death of their husbands (para. 117 of the fourth report). She would appreciate a clarification in the next periodic report. She expressed concern at the living conditions of female sugar-cane cutters, who, as immigrants without identification cards, were ineligible for Government assistance. Lastly, she urged the Government to address the problem of discrimination in the free-trade zones, where even women who were better educated than men received lower salaries and fewer benefits and had fewer opportunities to hold managerial or supervisory positions (paras. 260 to 264 of the fourth report).

47. Ms. ESTRADA CASTILLO observed that the two basic impediments to the advancement of women in the Dominican Republic, which the Government must confront, were the economic structural adjustment policies which had created the poverty that was at the root of all violations of women's rights, and the very

strong influence of the Roman Catholic Church in the political affairs of the country and the nefarious effects of some of its teachings on the development of adolescents, especially adolescent girls, and on their awareness of their rights. She asked whether the concordat between the Church and the Dominican Republic had been suspended. In view of the high maternal and infant mortality rates, it should be a Government priority to protect the right of women over their own bodies. With respect to the contradiction between the Civil Code and the Code for the Protection of Children and Adolescents (fourth report, para. 332), it was unclear whether the latter, a special law, took precedence over the more general law.

48. Ms. Yung Chung KIM, congratulating the Dominican Republic for the recent adoption of the General Education Act overhauling the curriculum, observed that illiteracy and poverty went hand in hand. Although apparently girls had a higher literacy rate and were more likely to complete primary education than boys, women found their employment opportunities limited and generally filled low-paying jobs or were paid less than men for equal work. She would like an explanation of why that was so; and suggested that more systematic vocational and career guidance services under the aegis of the Department for the Advancement of Women would help women advance to leadership positions.

49. Ms. SCHÖPP-SCHILLING said that the delegation had given a fascinating account of the radical economic, political and social changes being brought about in the country and the Government's determination to establish new policies systematically. A system-wide approach was the right one but in coming years, the Government must begin to prioritize, focusing on the eradication of poverty and illiteracy, on job creation and on enforcing existing labour legislation. The next report should indicate if the Government had established priorities and to what effect. She urged the Government, in establishing literacy programmes, to work with the two first-world countries which in Beijing had committed themselves to eradicating global illiteracy, namely, the United States of America and Germany.

50. She was very concerned about the free-trade zones, to which the West seemed to be exporting nineteenth-century capitalism and the exploitation of women. While granting tax incentives, the Dominican Republic must make it clear that such zones were not safe havens where labour laws did not apply, despite the welcome business they brought.

51. Ms. GUTIERREZ (Dominican Republic) said that her Government, ashamed at the situation prevailing under the previous Administration, had managed to make quite a few advances in the year and a half in which it had been in power, and would be spurred on by the comments and suggestions of the Committee. Even under the previous Government, the women in the technical departments had fought for women's rights, as did those now in the Government. All the women of the Dominican Republic were committed to that long-standing, ongoing battle - hence the sincerity of the fourth report. The next report would include many replies to the questions that the Committee had raised, and would give a picture of the further progress achieved.

52. The CHAIRPERSON, welcoming the clear information provided on the Dominican Republic's many achievements in such a short time, said that the report had been

very frank about the obstacles that persisted, but that the general commitment to overcome them was obvious. The fourth periodic report had been well organized and had given statistics permitting an objective assessment. Especially commendable were the machinery set up to implement the Beijing Platform for Action, the amendment to the agrarian reform legislation that had given women access to the land, and the attempt to alleviate poverty by making micro-business credit available to women.

53. The Committee remained concerned, however, by the high maternal mortality rate. Speaking as a doctor, she suggested that the incidence of toxaemia and anaemia were very likely connected with induced abortions and inadequate care during pregnancy and could be diminished by better protection of women's reproductive rights. Women need not die because they bore children. Furthermore, affirmative action would be needed to counter the negative impact of privatization and structural adjustment programmes on the health sector generally and especially on women's health. Another result of structural adjustment was to force women into the informal sector, where they usually received no social benefits, and the Government must take action to remedy that situation as well.

54. Regarding the free-trade zones, many Governments, in their quest for investment, tended to compromise the rights of their workers there, who often were not allowed to organize and negotiate for better wages. When, as in the Dominican Republic, the majority of such workers were women, the problem was compounded by sexual harassment in the workplace. Their well-being must be defended. The nationality law should be amended so that all born in the Dominican Republic had the same right to nationality; and the earlier law deporting Haitians should be repealed by the new Government, if it had not already done so.

55. Speaking in her personal capacity, and in no way implying the existence of racial discrimination, she would be interested in receiving gender-disaggregated data on blacks in the Dominican Republic in fields such as health, employment and the prison system.

56. Regarding the relations between the Government and the Roman Catholic Church, the Dominican Republic was a secular State and it would be contrary to the Constitution if the Church had undue influence on the policies of the Government.

The meeting rose at 5.50 p.m.